



GAZELLE

Vol 28 No 04 April 2013

مجموعة تراثي للتاريخ والطبيعي



Tigers in the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve. Photo Credit: Tamsin Carlisle

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Contributors

The Editor would like to thank the following for their reports and contributions:

Gary Feulner, Valerie Chalmers, Tamsin Carlisle, Jackie Strick and Binish Roobas

Date: Sun May 5 2013
Speaker: Steve James
Topic: *A Journey Across the Roof of the World*



About the speaker: I am a world traveler & interested in wild places & even wilder things. I have visited 111 countries over the last 40 or so years, all in the pursuit of natural history. Between my wanderings, I am the Senior Environmental Advisor for ADCO here in Abu Dhabi.

About the topic: *A Journey Across the Roof of the World* is about my trip across the Tibetan Plateau in 2012. It covers all things natural and a little bit of the early exploration of the area. It also touches upon future conservation challenges in this region.

Snapshot!



Adult 4 year old male Arabian Tahr currently on display at Arabia's Wildlife Centre, Sharjah—*snapshot sent in by Jackie Strick*

Announcements

End-of-Season Function

Our annual gathering before people leave for the summer will once again be held in the **Utsav Restaurant, The India Club, off Oud Metha Road** on **Thursday, 13th June 2013** at **7.30 p.m. for 8.00 p.m.**

Further details will be published in next month's Gazelle.

Annual Photographic Competition

The Annual Photographic Competition will be held once again at the End-of-Season Function. Members are invited to enter a maximum of **five** (returnable) prints on **UAE and Oman** natural history subjects from three different categories: **(a) Life on Earth: Plants/ Animals/ Fossils; (b) Earth & Environment: Landscapes/ Geology; (c) Man and his Influence: Archaeology/Architecture/Culture (People)/ Environment.** Photographs should be a minimum size of **5 inches x 7 inches (13 cm x 18 cm)** and should be mounted. The competition will be judged by everyone present. There will be a prize for each category and for the photograph voted the best overall. N.B. **The photographers must be present at the function.**

Valerie Chalmers, Vice-Chairman

DNHG visits the new Sikh Temple at Jebel Ali



To see more photos from a field trip to the Gurudwara, taken by DNHG member Tamsin Carlisle and led by Sandhya Prakash, use the following link:

<http://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10151820639869951.1073741836.681524950&type=1>
http://tinlight.smugmug.com/Category/Religion/Jebel-Ali-Sikh-Temple-UAE/28626567_RspFKc#!i=2422604191&k=RJ3z4rX

DNHG Trip to the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve

Avian encounters were not our main objective during the DNHG April 28 - May 2 field trip to the Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve in the Maharashtra province of India. But this was India, so they were hard to avoid.

Memorable wild-bird sightings, in my experience, can be divided into two broad categories: those involving birds that are seldom seen due to scarcity or factors such as cryptic appearance and habits, and those in which common birds are observed engaging in striking or unusual behaviour. On this trip, we were blessed with opportunities for both types of encounters.

In the first category, a stand-out sight was of a flock of Rosy Starlings (*Sturnus roseus*) feeding on the brilliant nectar-filled blooms adorning “flame of the forest” trees in the woods surrounding our lodge. One of the resident naturalists informed me that the starlings visit Tadoba as birds of passage, fuelling up for the onward migration, and would be gone within a week.

Another lucky sighting was of a delightful pair of Spotted Owlets (*Athene brama*) settling in for their morning roost in large jamum tree behind a 600-year-old temple. I’m not sure what made me think that the fuzzy brown patch amid the dense greenery was worth investigating, but I’m glad my birdy sense started twitching. These little owls are fairly common residents of open habitats and farmland in South Asia, but they are nocturnal, so not often seen during daytime.

Even more cryptic was the Savannah Nightjar (*Caprimulgus affinis*), superbly camouflaged on her nest among dead leaves on the ground. Our guide knew where to look because he had previously discovered the nest with two eggs but, without his guidance, she would have been completely overlooked by yours truly. What our guide didn’t know was that one of her eggs had hatched. I certainly can’t claim to have “spotted” the chick that my camera picked up, but look closely and you’ll see its head poking up in front of the mother’s breast.

Common birds in Tadoba, each special in its own way, included drongoes, peafowl and grey jungle fowl, a wide selection of water birds, magpie robins, orange-headed thrushes, jungle babblers and jewel-toned Indian rollers and kingfishers. Honey buzzards and shikra were also abundant, but we were probably lucky to see a Changeable or Crested Hawk-Eagle (*Nisaetus cirrhatus*) on its nest.

For me, the stand-out species in the common bird category, despite plain black plumage, was the Common or Fork-tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus adsimilis*), for its habit of perching on the backs of the local spotted deer. The deer weren’t bothered by this and it soon became apparent that the drongoes were providing a valued cleaning service by picking off ticks – in the exactly the same type of association as the better-known one between cattle egrets and bovines.

The Indian Rollers (*Coracias benghalensis*) and White-throated, or White-breasted, Kingfishers (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) were so spectacular that they deserve special mention, especially as each was spotted doing something interesting. Birds of both these relatively closely related species are prone to spending long periods in stationary perches on tree branches or other look-out points. However, one roller was seen dropping from its perch to the ground, where it flattened itself, wings spread forward and stayed for many minutes. The bird wasn’t exactly making itself unnoticeable, as the pose exposed the brilliant turquoise bars on its wings, and our guide said it was sunbathing. That was certainly plausible in the lakeside chill of early morning.

As for the kingfisher, my parting gift from Tadoba was the sight of one of these gorgeous birds perched on a telephone wire, vigorously shaking the large crab it had just caught. Who knew they fished for crabs, or indeed that there were crabs to be caught in such an inland location? Certainly not yours truly! *Report by Tamsin Carlisle*

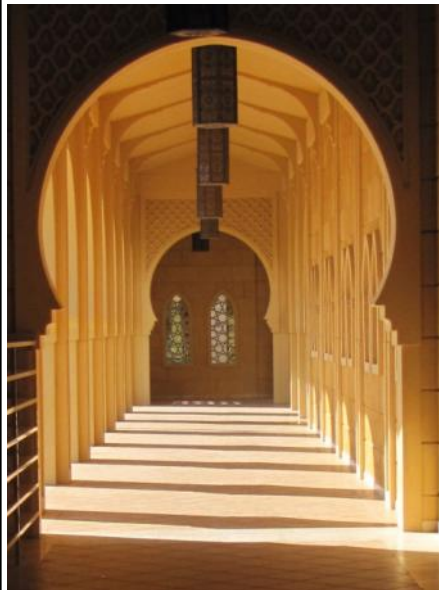


Field Trip Reports

Al Ain Mosque Architecture Tour

This was a tour (held on the morning of Friday 22nd February and repeated on the morning of Saturday 23rd February) which followed up on Dr Susanne Hofstra's excellent lecture on Mosque Architecture in Al Ain, which she gave on the Thursday evening (21st February), by 'visiting a few mosques that represent a living example of the architectural styles highlighted in the lecture'.

We visited 3 mosques. The first mosque (Bin Hamouda Mosque) near Al Ain Cromwell Hospital and at the back of Jimi Mall is quite a decorative mosque. The Bin Hamouda mosque is a modern mosque (2006) and a memorial benefaction. It is styled after the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus and Marrakech's famous Al Koutobia Mosque. It is a domed structure with a minaret and has a columnar praying hall with an adjacent courtyard surrounded by a colonnade.



Top left, clockwise: Looking Towards Women's Prayer Area; Entrance to Men's Prayer Hall; Colonnade

The second mosque which we visited is near Al Jahili Fort and is associated with the Fort. It bears a lot of resemblance to traditional mosques preserved on Delma Island. It has a courtyard with a low wall and a little service building, a mosque portico and a single room but no dome. The little step platform is for the *Mouazzen* (the person who makes the call to prayer). This seems to be similar to what the very earliest mosques in Mecca or Medina were like in the time of the Prophet Mohammed. The roofing material comes from palm and the walls are likely to have been built from mud-brick mixed with stone.



Left to Right: Mosque near Al Jahili Fort; Step Platform

The third mosque near Al Ain Oasis is, according to Dr. Ghava Al Dha-heri from ADACH, 1,200 years old and is one of the oldest mosques in the UAE. It is used only for praying in a small group rather than in the Friday prayer. There is no minaret. Here we have a niche projection on the outside reflecting where the qibla niche is on the inside, which is also seen in the traditional mosques on Delma Island. Again, it is built of mud-brick mixed with stone.



Mosque near Al Ain Oasis

Many thanks to Susanne Hofstra, Jake Gilson and Joseph Mansour for organizing such an excellent trip.

Report by Valerie Chalmers.

Photographs by Mairead Porter and Valerie Chalmers

Butterfly Tree



Spring is here and plants and animals that have been absent for the winter are coming back in full force, probably aided by periodic rain from September through February. Recently, lingering in the area of the Hanging Gardens (at the base of Jebel Qatar) after the IEW field trip there, we were treated to a remarkable performance set on the stage of a large but straggling *Maerua crassifolia* tree on a stony hillside.

From a distance we could see that the tree was in flower and was attracting butterflies, so we went to look. *M. cras-*

sifolia, a tree-sized (and normally erect) member of the caper family (Capparaceae), is locally common in the foothills of the Hajar Mountains in Northern Oman, but it disappears northwards and Jebel Qatar is the northernmost outpost of this population. It is so far unknown in the adjacent UAE but reports exist of scattered individual trees in the Wadi Ghalilah area north of Ras al-Khaimah.

At least two regional butterfly species use this tree as a food plant. One is the widespread Caper White which has other foodplant species as well. The second is the more localized Desert Orange Tip, which may be more specialized since it is reliably found in association with *M. crassifolia* and has not been recorded in the UAE where that tree is absent.



Both of those butterflies were found at the tree we visited – a single Caper White and perhaps a dozen or so Desert Orange Tips, some apparently fresh but some quite tattered. In addition, the tree's distinctive flowers (which have a spray of long stamens but no petals) attracted a number of other butterfly species, which grew as we watched: Blue

Pansy, Small Salmon Arab, Blue Spotted Arab, African Babul Blue, Mediterranean Pierrot and finally a lone Giant Skipper. The latter is a common and distinctive Omani butterfly whose range only just barely extends into the UAE; its foodplant, too (*Acridocarpus orientalis*, the Arabic *qafas* plant), is a species that diminishes northwards, only reaching the UAE at the northern tip of Jebel Hafit. Two other butterfly species were seen in the area, although not on our *M. crassifolia*: Desert White and Desert Black Tip, making a total of ten for the day. Report by Gary Feulner and Binish Roobas



Top to bottom: Desert Orange Tip *Colotis liagore*, not yet recorded within the UAE, Caper White *Anaphaeis aurota*, known to use *Maerua crassifolia* as a foodplant, Giant Skipper *Coeliades anchises*, a species found in the UAE only at Jebel Hafit Photo Credit: Binish Roobas

Field Clips

Dressed for Success?



Even a not-so-casual observer could be forgiven for mistaking the UAE lizards in the accompanying photos for the same species. Both have a vivid black-and-white striped body and a bright royal blue tail. This coloration is so striking, at least to human observers, that it might reasonably be reckoned unique, but it is not.

Both photos show juvenile lizards, but of two rather different species. The Blue-Tailed Lizard *Omanosaura cyanura* (formerly *Lacerta cyanura*—*photo below*) is a denizen of the bedrock wadi environments of the Hajar Mountains, where it is endemic. Bosk's Fringe-Toed Lizard *Acanthodactylus boskianus* (*photo left*) is a sand and gravel dwelling relative of the several UAE species of fringe-toed lizards found in sandy desert environments.

Exactly why this seemingly distinctive coloration should be favored in two rather different juvenile lizards inhabiting two rather different environments is an interesting question. Since the two species are not closely related their colors must represent parallel evolution, possibly/probably related to camouflage value. (Remember, even the zebra's distinctive stripes are generally interpreted as a form of camouflage on the African veldt.)

But this raises the further question why such protective coloration is abandoned by the corresponding adults. The answer to that question is complicated by the fact that the adults of the Blue-Tailed Lizard arguably become more conspicuous by virtue of their blue tails and throats, whereas adults of Bosk's Fringe-Toed Lizard arguably become less vivid and more variegated in color.

In any case, these phenomena emphasize the need for close and careful observation (or photographs), even when it seems unnecessary. As birdwatchers perhaps know best, there may exist confusingly similar alternatives for even the most conspicuously colored species, so it pays to check details in the field, while you can. *Report by Gary Feulner*



New Names for Old Gastropods

Molecular genetic studies continue to revise and re-shuffle the names of familiar regional molluscan groups. That doesn't diminish the fascination of our diverse and beautiful UAE seashells, but it does make it harder to keep track of which is related to which, and to ensure that other observers are talking about the same organisms. A recent study by researchers at the British Museum re-categorizes the Subfamily Rapaninae, a group of predatory marine snails within the Family Muricidae. The taxonomy of this group had been a matter of dispute even among experts using traditional morphological and anatomical criteria.



From a local perspective, the results affect the nomenclature of shells treated in several subfamilies in *Seashells of Eastern Arabia* (Bosch et al. 1995), including shell #s 480 through 498. In particular, shells of the genus *Thais*, which in SEA includes 7 genera, are now distributed among a number of other old and new genera. The most frequently encountered of these, *Thais savignyi*, a common intertidal species on exposed rocks and jetties, has become *Thalessa savignyi*. The robust *Thais bufo*, found in the UAE only on the East Coast, has temporarily been left without a taxonomic home, pending further study. A copy of the Rapaninae paper is available on request (Claremont et al. 2012, in *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution*). *Report by Gary Feulner*

Thasella lacera, formerly *Thais lacera* (a/k/a *Thais carinifera* or *T. mutabilis*) *Photo Credit: Gary Feulner*

Dubai Natural History Group Recorders

Reptiles - Dr Reza Khan

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off 344 0462

Astronomy - Lamjed El-Kefi

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off: 06-5583 003
email: lankefi@emirates.net.ae

Marine Life - Lamjed El-Kefi

Geology - Gary Feulner

res: 306 5570

Insects – Gary Feulner

Fossils - Valerie Chalmers

res: 394 8871
email: valeriechalmers@gmail.com

Plants – Valerie Chalmers

Archaeology, Seashells, Birds and Mammals - Recorders needed!

The recorders are not necessarily scientific experts in their designated fields. In fact, most are not. However, they are interested and knowledgeable amateurs - please contact them if you have any interesting reports or queries.

The intention is that information will be channelled through to the *Gazelle* editor, so new information can be shared with all our readers.

Are You a Techie with Time?

The website sub-committee would like to find volunteers who can help with maintenance of the on-line newsletter, and to upload the wealth of information and photographs from past *Gazelles*. Full training will be given. Contact any Committee person - we will be very pleased to hear from you!

Earthquakes in the UAE

Residents have experienced tremors from a series of Earthquakes occurring in Iran over the past few weeks in April. On April 9th an Earthquake occurred in Iran which measured 6.3 on the Richter scale. More recently, Iran experienced a 7.8 on the Richter scale, and tremors from the strong quake were felt here in the UAE.

Rumors were abounding that a prediction for a devastation UAE earthquake was due to hit, but predicting earthquakes is not yet an accurate science and such rumors are unfounded.

For more information on the Iran Earthquakes, visit:

<<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/uae/weather/iran-earthquake-felt-in-uae-and-arabian-gulf-1.1168528>>

<<http://www.emirates247.com/news/emirates/earthquake-rocks-uae-no-more-aftershocks-expected-2013-04-17-1.502866> >

<http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?xfile=data/weather/2013/April/weather_April14.xml§ion=weather >

For more general information on Earthquakes, visit:

<<http://earthquake.usgs.gov/> >

<<http://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/> >

Earth Day in the UAE

Earth Day is being celebrated all across the UAE this year on April 22. Organizations such as Dubai Aquarium, Children's City, and Sharjah City Center are encouraging pledges to becoming more green in daily living and reduce waste. Ideas were innovative, including "reverse vending machines".

For more information about Earth Day in the UAE, visit:

<http://www.khaleejtimes.com/kt-article-display-1.asp?xfile=data/todayevent/2013/April/todayevent_April26.xml§ion=todayevent>

<<http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/uae/general/earth-day-in-uae-marked-with-clean-up-drives-and-recycling-projects-1.1173817>>

<<http://www.ameinfo.com/childrens-city-celebrates-earth-day-338596>>

<<http://www.albawaba.com/editorchoice/uae-celebrates-earth-day-reverse-vending-421846> >

Dubai Natural History Group Programme

Lectures at Emirates Academy of Hospitality Management, 7.30 for 8.00pm

May 5 2013

Steve James: *A Journey Across the Roof of the World*

Field Trips (Members Only)

Field trips for May/June are being organized at present and details will be announced/confirmed by e-mail circular.

DNHG COMMITTEE 2013

When possible, please contact committee members outside office hours

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Contributions

Do you have a field report, unusual finding, interesting news article, book review, amazing photograph, or community news to share?

If so, email your contributions to: gazelleeditor@gmail.com (Arial 10 justified).

DNHG Membership

Membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dhs. 100 for couples and Dh. 50 for singles. Membership is valid from Sep 2012 to Sep 2013. You can join or renew at meetings or by sending us a cheque made out to **HSBC** account no. 030100242001. (Please note we **cannot** cash cheques made out to the DNHG.)

Payment can also be made by cash deposit at a bank or ATM, using our IBAN number AE900200000030100242001. However, this process does **not** identify you as the payer. If you wish to pay by cash, please also **scan** and e-mail a copy of your payment confirmation to the Membership Secretary, so we know whose money we have received.

DNHG membership entitles you to participate in field trips and helps pay for our lecture hall, publication and distribution of our monthly newsletter, the *Gazelle*, our post office box, additions to our library, incidental expenses of speakers and occasional special projects.